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MEASURE 2001

Megan Bodnar

Lance Crow

Tina Carroll

Maura Giles

Emily Glende

Amanda Goins

Timothy Hayes

Susan Huss

Ellen Jones

Bree Ma'Ayteh

William Mottolese

Amanda Jo Niccum

Beth Nix

Sara Post

Kim Riccardo

Nicholas T. Schafer

Jennifer Sherburne

Patrick J. Smith

Erik Steffen

Megan Taylor

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MEASURE

*Saint Joseph's College
Rensselaer, Indiana
Volume LXVIII*

MEASURE
Spring 2001

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Publisher
Dr. Albert Shannon

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In Praise of the Silent Ones

Nicholas T. Schafer

i have seen the greatest talent of my time,
pass by the wayside,
shoved aside by the arrogance of a generation.

the contemporaries of star-athletes and cheerleaders,
of partiers and slackers,
they have been forgotten.

hidden somewhere behind the flash and disappointment
of generation X,

they are the ones who remain silent.
and will bring about change to the world,

for they are the ones...

Who are thinkers,
yet their theories lie dormant in the mind.

Who are great orators,
yet cannot find their voice.

Who are authors,
Whose volumes have yet to be written.

Who are poets,
Whose sonnets are held prisoner behind walls of fear.

Who are lovers,
That do not share their feelings for fear of rejection.

Who are heroes,
That have yet to reach their battle.

Who are leaders,
But have no one to follow them.

to those who are unheard, the world is yours.

Cool Whip
Emily Glende

The family refrigerator
is a biology experiment.

The food items that enter
are often forgotten.

Every now and then
someone brave enough
will open one of the mysterious
“Cool Whip” containers.

A specimen of a formerly edible substance
is revealed to the curious discoverer.

Now this matter is indecipherable.
Only its shape is known,
for it is coated
in a thick layer of green fuzz.

At Recess
Susan Huss

Put your foot in
Who's the one?
Batman, Batman,
Fly right out.
All are welcome,
Get in line
Hopscotch, Kickball
Hoola Hoop,
Jump rope, Skipping
Run around,
Catch me, Kick that.
Ha—You're frozen
TV Tag,
Salt and Pepper
Double Dutch
Any Weather
Running, Skipping
Jumping, Kicking
Ring around the rosy
We all fall down.

The Webs We Weave

Maura Giles

Dance! Spider! Dance!
Spin your web
with no worries.

Dance! Spider! Dance!
What do you know,
or care?

Dance! Spider! Dance!
No one knows
the magician's secrets.

Dance! Spider! Dance!
Keep your egg-sack
safe and warm.

Dance! Spider! Dance!
The test tube baby
was just the beginning.
Dance! Spider! Dance!

The Counting Game

Nicholas T. Schafer

one

The little ones trot up stairs to bed
Smothered by drowsiness, a young man keeps watch
from a haphazard pile of blankets on the couch.

Sleep overcomes him, and he dreams.
Of his life, flavorful memories revisit the senses.
His heart fills with the faces of loved ones,
he recognizes them all,
except one.
One face does not belong

He awakes to find rotten yellow eyes
starring at him from the abyss of a shadow. Not moving
remaining fixed.

Fear for the little ones
crashes into him. He tries to cry out,
but finds the act impossible.

The nectar of life
seeps from the stalk of his neck
it pools and he dives in.

two

Brothers face each other in combat.
Both, battered and broken
neither willing to lose any ground.

The field
is drawn, and wagers set.

The signal is given, the ball snapped
they charge,
crash,
collapse.

One rises. The other remains with the earth,
never again to fight, or love, or live.

Perpetual night attacks the survivor.
existence becomes pain, a burden to endure.
Mercy shows no yellow brick road.
But escape becomes a reality with the steel flower.
Its keen petal pushing deep into his roots
severing them,
ending the pain.

three

A young mother commits her sons to God,
grief-stricken a father asks, "why?"
Life plods on.

Revenge
Megan Bodnar

Lost in concentration,
my face is illuminated by a single candle.
Soft chanting flows from my lips
as I force my anger into energy.
Readying the needle, I bathe it
in the flame.
I plunge it down, deep into wax
wishing it were flesh.
Releasing all malice
All anger
all pain
on the glowing object before me.
Melted wax drips like blood
thick down the wounded base.
Finally satisfied, a short breath
plunges me into cool darkness.

An English Class

Maura Giles

I try to pay attention to his words,
But I am lost in the blurry buzz of his voice:

I hear him talk with words unclear.
His tone is tense, and I sense fear.

With various gestures, he turns to me.
And I react accordingly.

I haven't heard a word he spits.
He's captivated surrounding twits.

All I hear in his mood and tone:
The iambic way he likes to drone.

I watch the clock as time runs down.
"Tick-tock" matches his trochee sound.

With every change in surrounding din,
He changes his meter again and again.

He stops talking, and I leave the room.
I do not know what happened in class today.

The Death of Boys and Girls

William Mottolese

Heaven

Their faces were icons in plastic bags.
Unblinking, they died as dark as mud.
Faith's cold flash had shown them the way out.

There must have been one, at least
who didn't quite believe, felt death was not a gate
beyond the stars. Did life rise like gorge in that one's throat,

his joints swelling against redemption?
Still his public face united with the stars;
he knew the other boys and girls wanted to die.

Hell

After she smiles through a soda at him, he winks at her.
Then her wrists in his hands are plastic straws.
Titanic, an authorized video, rock him to sleep

when she is finally stacked with boxes in a dumpster.
"Cardboard only," only the sniffing dogs could find her;
Her mother cries; her hands are oven mitts.

Earth

About the two boys, their eyes were young and deep.
They found their father's sawed-off shotgun in the cellar
While he slept above. Across a field, they tore

behind the houses on their street, and, only twelve,
not knowing guns, blasted out a row of windows
as other children went to school. Screams of schoolgirls

shocked them into stopping. As they stood alone,
their round eyes stared, still as polished stones,
like Cain's eyes knowing what he'd done.

Colorado
Megan Taylor

Driving in blind loneliness
Thinking today how it's been a while since
I have looked at the clouds, I saw them
A separate dimension transcending colorless walls
Children running away with my innocence
Speeding in helpless tantrums
To twin towers atop canopies of stripped trees
Mountains robbing refuge, bluer skies conquering
Painful wants, ancient bonds
Somehow an impossible dream became
Horribly realized, turning me out
Scattering life into millions of feathers on
Westerlies, tossing about furiously in sobs
Homeless island, missing pieces
No one seems to miss at all
Pictures hold no memory, the street no comfort
Idle phones in cradles of hollow words
Lying in the empty spaces
Surreal, the world bending away from my reach
Clocks melting in arid distance
Dripping toward idealistic sanctuaries
Of nuclear union
As I drift into sleep at the wheel

Lighthouse Bride

Sara Post

He sailed his golden bride across the deep
To the lighthouse shore he pledged to keep
A mid-sea island of their own,
Just two in company,
In love alone.

With Dainty feet she rest on the sand.
The beacon created an enchanted land.
With a sweep of its guiding arm through the night
She wondered at the power
Of that tiny light.

Sweet spring of love passed away
The wind grew more withered each sea-salty day,
Moaning the songs it used to sing
And crashed the waves
Once whispering.

The blue of her world spent her heart
Stranding her a lifetime apart
Distant shores became a dream
Of once and wish,
The waved expense stood in between.

One day on a ship from the mainland it arrived
A gift her husband alone contrived
The love of her youth
Of gentle song
Was forgotten in slow years grown along

Her slim white fingers gently caressed
Tiny feet on the pedals she rest
Eighty-eight keys, white and black
In tuned melody
Brought memory back.

A single ballad of dappled black notes
Survived the tossed journey on the boat
To be plucked from silence
Graying and thin
For his story told so grim.

The ballad filled her nights and days
With a fury of purpose as she played
His round black notes.
Fingers never stopped their strokes.
The tale of the ballad never broke.

Tossed about by torrent wind
A fierce-fury night grew vile and grim
As the ballad wracked him from his sleep
The long lost silence he wished to keep
Rejoined him as the night grew deep.

With an ax he blastly broke each key,
Splinter and string, tossed them to the sea
Lastly his yellowed bride
From his anger could not hide
So with her song sadly died.

The gale swept blue had all his life
Before dawn drowned morning he joined his wife
Together alone
In their watery bed
Twenty years from the day they wed.

The Best Big Sister I Never Had

Bree Ma'Ayteh

As soon as I walked through the door, I knew things were different. My mother was sitting at the kitchen table, alone. The house was strangely quiet.

"Where's Nicole?" I asked. A horrible growth of dread was already starting to form in the pit of my stomach, and I knew what had happened before my mom replied:

"She went home."

"What're you doin', Nicole?"

"Writing a poem," she replied, not looking up from her notebook.

"Can I read it?" I asked, interested.

"Sure..." She handed me her latest masterpiece.

Love is fatal, love is kind

Love is not forever mine

But if by chance our love should end from your heart,

Always know that I will love you to

The End

I loved it so much, she wrote out another copy for me right then and there. I was in love with everything Nicole did.

I was ten years old, and my cousin was almost fourteen when she came to live with my family that summer. Nicole's home life wasn't going very well. Her mother, my aunt Tia, was mentally unstable. She had always had a lot of problems; or, at least, for as long as I had known her. My dad told stories of Tia pulling out ultrasound pictures of a baby that she had miscarried. Scary stuff for a little girl to hear. Not only did she show scary pictures, she lied a lot, and was always putting down her kids. There was Nicole and her two younger brothers, Glen and JoJo. (Nicole had an older sister, Nanette, but her whereabouts changed at least once a month, depending on the guy she was with.) The boys were a wild couple of kids, but Nicole didn't conduct herself that way. She was smart and polite and practically a teenager; a great person all around. However, she and her mother fought a lot, and it finally reached a point

where my cousin couldn't bear living at home anymore. She needed a place to go.

My parents were a bit wary at first. They already had five children, me being the oldest. They didn't have any experience when it came to raising a teenage girl. But my mom and dad weren't the kind of people to turn family members away, and within a week, Nicole was living with us. Having such a small apartment, Nicole shared a room with my sister Samantha and me. Nicole took the top bunk, and Samantha and I shared the bottom.

I was ecstatic. The one thing I had always wanted was an older brother or sister, and it seemed that God had found a way to answer my prayers. And He couldn't have picked a better person than Nicole. I had idolized her for as long as I could remember. She was a beautiful girl, with her long golden hair, a flawless complexion, and the most energetic brown eyes I had ever seen. She could have been an angel and I wouldn't have been the least bit surprised.

It was wonderful to have Nicole around. Looking back, I find it hard to believe that we spent as much time together as we did. After all, she *was* four years older than I was. She introduced me to music—we would stay up all night watching videos on MTV, making fun of the singers and performing with candlesticks off of my mother's dining room table. I remember she had a special dislike for Mariah Carey, who at the time had just come out with her first single and music video. "She always has her hair in her face," my cousin commented. "How she can see anything?"

She talked to me about boys, and let me ramble on about the current love of my life. We wrote silly poetry, and recorded ourselves singing love songs off the radio. We loved to sing to Wilson Phillips. "Hold On" was our song.

Nicole was especially fun when it came to doing chores around the house. My cousin had the ability to turn something as boring as drying and putting away dinner dishes into one of the many bright spots of my day. I remember a time when Samantha was washing dishes, and Nicole and I were drying them and putting them away. When Samantha would leave the room, Nicole would spit on a dish and put it back in the sink. Samantha couldn't figure out why it was taking her so long to wash a few plates! My laughter was what gave us away, and the two of us

got in trouble for it later, but I didn't care. Anything my cousin did, in my eyes, was wonderful.

Of course, there were bad times between us, too. I distinctly (and with embarrassment) remember a time when I was in the bathroom and realized too late that there was no more toilet paper. I opened the door a crack and called out, "Nicole, can you grab me some napkins, please?"

"No problem," she called back, and I continued to sit patiently. Two minutes, five minutes, a half-hour! After what seemed like an eternity, Nicole came by me with Samantha and a stack of napkins. I reached out for the napkins eagerly, but when they were just within my reach, Nicole snatched her hand away. Instead, she handed a few to my sister, and they then proceeded to rip up the napkins into tiny pieces and throw them at the bathroom door.

I was so humiliated, I started to cry, and it didn't take long for the tears to turn into loud wailing. They eventually gave me what I had asked for, but I didn't speak to my cousin for two days—a record for me.

While I was busy having my adventures with Nicole, my mother was doing her best to make sure Nicole felt comfortable with us. Sometimes, though, it didn't seem like enough. Nicole would complain that her curfew was too early, that she didn't have enough free time to be with her friends. One thing that especially bothered my cousin was that she wasn't allowed to visit her friends in her old neighborhood. Tia knew that Nicole was living with family members, but she didn't know who or where. Everybody was afraid that she would harass my family and try to take Nicole away, so her whereabouts were kept a secret. My mother was afraid that Tia would find her if she was spotted hanging around her old house. This caused many fights between my mom and Nicole, and I didn't know what to do. I didn't think my mom was wrong, but I didn't want Nicole to get mad at me.

Despite the problems, though, life was good. I loved her as much as I did any one of my siblings, and I saw in her everything I wanted to become. She was beautiful, she was smart, she had great handwriting, a lovely voice.... I could literally find no fault in her.

All of this made it harder for me to understand that she was gone.

"What happened?" I asked. I felt as if my feet were frozen to the floor, and that I wouldn't be able to move until I heard that it wasn't true, that Nicole hadn't really left us.

"She just missed her mother, honey, and asked your father to take her home. That's where she belongs. You know she couldn't stay here forever."

It sounded like my mother was trying to convince herself, as well as me, that this was for the best. But when I met her eyes, I saw her lower lip tremble, and her complexion took a brilliant shade of red. I know that my face must have matched hers, because she stood up and opened her arms. As she crushed me in a hug, the lump that was forming in my throat materialized into heavy sobs, and I felt as if I would never be able to stop crying.

For the rest of the day, nobody spoke any more about Nicole. But the whole family was painfully aware of her absence at dinner, and I knew that washing the dishes would never be the same.

I Grew a Peach Tree

Erik Steffen

I grew a peach tree
I planted the seed
I watered it
All I wanted to do was watch it grow.

I grew one of the tallest peach trees
And I was happy just having a tall, beautiful tree.
One day, the tree yielded a fruit
The temptation was too great.

I planted my hands softly around the beautiful peach
And took a bite out of its supple flesh
The fruit wasn't yet ripe
Though it was my first, it was the sweetest I had ever tasted.

I tended to that tree for four years
And it grew and grew
And it yielded many fruit, and though I could only reap
The benefits of this beautiful tree a few times a year, I
watered and fertilized the tree.

One winter, it grew unusually cold.
And before I noticed it, a frost hand had covered most
every branch.
And I didn't know what to do.
I couldn't get the frost off.

But someone else could.
And before I noticed, someone else was caring for my tree.
It was still my tree, and still is.

But she's in the hands of a more adequate nurturer now.

I tried to chop it down-she didn't fall
I stopped caring for it all together
She only grew stronger
So I ran

I ran to another orchard
And tasted fruit from unfamiliar trees
They satisfied my hunger
But none were as sweet as *my peaches*.

Now I am lost in a forest
Far far away from my tree.
My tree is still growing
And unfortunately, still yielding fruit

I don't know the new gardener
But I hear he's good
At least he's taking care of my tree
While I'm looking for another seed to plant.

Nightly Encounters

Lance Crow

I saw a fly upon the wall
Or was it ceiling, floor or all?
Then Elvis did appear right there
And I was in my underwear
A tiny dog yapped at my feet
Oddly enough to the King's beat
Then flying weasels, steaks and bugs
Crashed in and splattered on my rug
Persian silk, only the best
And then, I, standing fully dressed
Approached the bench at OJ's trial
Where sat the killer with a smile
A doughnut appeared first in my fist
But then a knife, a fitting twist
I plunged it into his thick chest
Only to make a sloppy mess
Of marbles, crayons and dirty socks
It seems I stabbed my own toy box
While flying to the planet Mars
Inside one of those Jetson cars
I saw Judy and lovely Jane
And was in my skivvies once again
We then jumped into the back seat
And interrupted a large retreat
Of Puritans, whose arms we tried to break
And so they burned me at the stake
But I escaped real fast and quick
Because I said "Your fly's down, slick"
And so I ran as fast I could
Until some guy screamed, "Clean the mud!"

I thought, Why does he speak of such?
And then I pushed down on the clutch
Of my big rig, with thirteen wheels
Which did perspire, spin and squeal
Until they mashed a little man
Dwelling inside a sardine can
I didn't know it at the time,
He'd been a relative of mine
He enjoyed being pieces in large board games
But he was dead with me to blame
And then I heard my Fruit Loops crying
Kermit the Frog was yelling again
And the clock said "It's four eighty-seven past ten" ...
While daytime on my nerves does prey
The nighttime is when brains may play

The Blue Eyed Girl

Tim Hayes

Standing out in the moonlight
glancing into those glaring eyes
as i see them sparkle in the moonlight
i know that she is a special goddess
A gift from heaven sent on down
to me with a small gratitude of faith
as i look into those blue eyes
A tear comes to my face in slow awakened horror
to realize her glare has been toned down a bit
just to set my eyes upon hers and smile in the sheltered chaos.
seeing the people pretend
the eyes of hers go weary
just to me seem a little fascinated
to be such pretty
by the goddess with the blue eyes
the destruction of red sadness
drives all to madness
makes the blue eyed goddess
deprived from her beauty
standing alone
wandering about
the watered down earth
sensing the death around
near the darkened ground
the illuminating moonlight
shone from heaven's above
just to try and shove
her face out into victory
to complete the story
that remains the same
dealing with pretty
people that deliver
such a performance
the blue eyed girl
or goddess
as the story told
so now behold
the beauty
of the girl with blue eyes.

Longing
Susan Huss

A shocking white winter day.
Crisp cold wind knocks the breath out of you,
Unbearable silence whispers in your ear,
Black, leafless trees promise nothing,
Wood smells burn away hopes and dreams.
Nothingness stares you in the face.

The Real World

Sara Post

we drive there in Ford Escorts-
to high rise buildings
and cardboard boxes
to build
to create
to be

the humming of working minds
drones out the dullness
Searched through souls frantically scour again
wondering where we are,
who we have been but not who we were

the years of miles fall away,
we are never there
Though they said this was it
we have become
Beliefs
Ourselves
Something

A celebration of warm bodies losing
and an old red Escort trying to find an end
without a journey
they are not invited,
but
no one told them where they are

Department Store Lady

Emily Glende

She sneaks up on you.
Her shrill voice pierces
Through your thoughts.
She asks, "Can I help you?"
You turn and notice
Her fake smile
Coated, teeth and all,
In fuchsia lipstick
And a fragrance too strong to inhale
Without wheezing.
Hoping to escape
You mutter, "Just looking."

Mr. Right
Jennifer Sherburne

He has a warm smile that lights up the room.
Clear blue eyes of honesty,
and hair I can run my fingers through.

He has a warm embrace that I can get lost in,
a listening ear,
and a comforting voice.

He has a laugh that makes me smile.
An open heart,
and a soul that loves me for who I am.

He has strong hands that hold mine as we take walks at night.
A shoulder that is damp with my tears,
and a mouth that offers soothing words of encouragement.

He has a strong faith in God.
Trying to do his will.
Living each day to the fullest.

There is only one thing he doesn't have.
My Heart.
Because I don't know him yet.

I traveled to a place, so very far away...

Beth Nix

I traveled to a place, so very far away...
Where the grass was so tall,
It would bury me into nothingness.
Where the wind whispered to me
Through the rustling of leaves in the treetop.
Where I would take my great big red ball
And with all my might, send it straight into the sun.
Where I could swing so far into the sky,
My toes got tangled in the clouds.
Where I ran to the peak of a grassy hill,
Then tumbled and somersaulted to the bottom.
Where at the end of the day,
I would lie in the cushion of grass,
Looking at the circus of clouds above me.
Where I had to be called so many times
Before I would pull myself away for a meal or nap.
Where I would pick a delicate bouquet
Of dandelions for mom to put on her nightstand.
Where summer lasted far longer,
And the sun danced for endless hours.

I awaken to my life....
Where the field has gone to a distant,
Yet sacred dwelling in my heart.

Fragrant Secrets
(Imitation of Diane Wokoski's *Wind Secrets*)
Bree Ma'Ayteh

I like perfume
With its vibrant scents and subtle meanings.
Sneaky perfume.
I like the lazy way it works itself
Through my body.
When I was little
I used to sit on the brown patch of rug in
my bedroom and stare at a spot on the floor,
While some clever fragrance breathed and blew into Momma's
hair.

"Sneaky perfume,"
I murmured to myself.

I would ask Momma when she came to tuck me in
What the perfume said.

Momma knew.

And the perfume whispered and sang from its
Secure spots on her wrists and neck, laughing with glee
At my expense.
I saw Momma in the high heels that pinched her feet and the
Ripped stockings I'd only seen in second hand stores
"Sneaky perfume," I said.
But my heart sobbed in fear.
I remember her perfume better than any other scent.
It was the first thing I smelled
With my eyes and my nose,
A smell that didn't apologize or plead,
And the smells swam into my head
And pushed open my eyes.

(continued)

It was the first thing I smelled
Besides the sweat of some stranger on my mother's overcoat.
The smell slapped me in a way Momma never would have.
Sneaky perfume.

The perfume sings
While I cry at the sight of the overcoat over Momma's chair.
Sneaky perfume.
Sneaky perfume.
Oh, wipe your tears.
There was nothing I could do.

Haiku(s)
Maura Giles

Alarm clock buzzes.
Sheets and blanket are too warm.
Another Monday.

His monotone words
Go into my left ear,
And out of my right.

My stomach growls with
Pain; The cafeteria
Food is horrible.

Outside the window.
A slew of crows fiercely flap
Their synchronized wings.

Homemade bread calls me
The aroma of fresh yeast
Right from the oven.

I wrote a Haiku.
Twas especially for you.
But my dog ate it.

Senior
Anonymous

-is saint joe too small or am I just dumb and foolish-

To the one that I am scared to get to know
every day a thought comes to mind
and each day I fall a little farther behind
for each day that I do not speak
I feel like a cheat
I wonder what is in your head or if
I will ever dread
not speaking the truth
before the spark is dead
I promise myself that I will always say hi,
but the rest I just can't let fly
my chances may have gone by
all those days that I should not have said good-bye
to see you smile brings a tear to my eye
my hair may fall out
before I ever get the courage to take you out again
we once said that we would keep in touch
I hope that that holds true for both of us

Woodstock '99

Ellen Jones

The unity of moving masses
madly swaying to a tortured tune
the melody provocative, destructive; beckoning as if it ties our souls
with
guitar strings and leads them where it wishes them to go
the surge of an innumerable crowd
a world of individuals unmasked, amassed
in the same breath, the same lyric, the same straining surges
perspectives become dim as the melody
snares you,
moves you,
lifts you,
an emotional burden, and then a building- such a building!

A catharsis crescendoing to a breaking point
features flinching and straining as you reach out, cry out
close your eyes-
and with the suddenness of a bursting dam
out of the people pandemonium pours
raging, raging, raging-raging
like hell.

And then, this raging sea of humanity swells
with brutality, hatred, anger, unhappiness
blending because there is nowhere to go
just up and down and off into the darkness
running headlong into the headlights of this rash of blindness.

And now,
I hear the screams of the girls being raped
and the acrid smoke of the hell-fires, which seek to consume the peace,
fills my lungs
and I choke on their acid taste

as people dance like wild Indians about them
silhouetted in their flickering, fiendish light
and I feel the trampled, brutalized, beaten humanity underneath my
feet as I run
run, with the others
as we flee from those who play with that fire
who play with that rage

coax it and let it come
letting the smoke waft up and leaving the remnants
to be blown away, cleaned up, dismissed.

Lying on my back
the cool blades of the grass just overlapping vision
I turn my head and feel the coolness seep into my fevered cheeks
and watch the waves in the weeds swept by the winds

just like the ocean
just like the water
just like our existence

like the wind in the water

for tomorrow it will be forgotten
for tomorrow it will be forgotten.

Coming Home
Nicholas T. Schafer

My Grandfather, at 87,
shuffles across the play yard heading for the barn,
squinting to keep out the glare of the sun,
his glossy crown protected from burn by the
old "Pioneer Seed" ball cap that's tossed atop his head.

Years ago, in Crown Point, at the old farm
brothers gathered their families together,
women made pies, men drank beer,
children rode ponies and played in the orchards.
Life was much simpler then.

They should be over here, he says,
as we climb behind the mound of machinery
that has been collected over the years. The
tables come out with ease, and we start to set
the stage for yet another family picnic.

It was the last year that we were all home
before any of us left to get married or to fight in the war.
We were all there; Ed, Joe, Woody, Dorothy, Mill, and I
sitting around the table, as if there was nothing in the world
that could bother us. Life was good then.

Hours later cousins arrive,
aunts and uncles bring gifts, brothers and sisters greet one another,
and parents sit back while their family comes home,
if only for a little while.
Life is good.

The Baseball
(Imitation of Elizabeth Bishop's *The Fish*)
Eric Steffen

Stumbling behind the left field fence
I found a tattered old baseball
I leant down and picked it up
It's leather slimy
And seams torn off
With its yarn spilling out
Like intestines of a medieval battle victim
But not red,
Dark blue and grey
And coarse,
Like an unshaven face at 5
And musky with
The smell of months in the clay
Amongst the weeds and briars
And curious rodents
And I picked it up
With empathetic eyes
Seeing a game winning home run
Or a foul ball
Or an errant throw
During the pre-game warm-ups
This old ball,
Not worth playing catch with
But worth the story it told me
And I picked it up
Onced over it one more time
And chucked it back into the woods

Devil Dreams

Bree Ma'Ayteh

"Bedtime!"

I don't wanna go to sleep! I have scary dreams at night. Dreams about the devil. He always chases me and laughs at me and tells me he's going to take me to Hell with him. I try to tell Momma that, but she doesn't understand. She makes me go to bed every night, and every night I dream about the devil.

"Cecily? Did you hear me? Go brush your teeth and get ready for bed!"

I go the bathroom snail-slow, and brush my teeth with my Barbie toothbrush, trying to take a long time so that I don't have to dream about the devil yet. Momma doesn't know how scary he can be. He has big vampire teeth and black eyeballs and has a tail like my old dog Buddy, only the devil's is longer.

"Cecily?" I look up and see Momma standing in the doorway to the bathroom, with her arms folded and looking real mad.

"I'm sure your teeth aren't so dirty that you need to brush them for 10 minutes," she says. I spit the toothpaste in the sink and follow her to my bedroom. She stands in front of my bed and points to it. I get a funny feeling in my stomach, like I'm gonna puke all over my Pretty Princess blanket.

"Momma," I cry. "I don't wanna go to bed! I'm not even tired!"

"Oh, really? Well, that yawn you did when you were watching TV a half an hour ago sure fooled me. No excuses, young lady. Into bed you go."

I want to cry, but Momma doesn't like it when I do that. I climb into bed and under my covers. I bet the devil is watching me from Hell. I bet he's getting ready to come and get me.

"That's a good girl," Momma says, and kisses me on the lips. I kiss her back but I'm still scared.

"I love you Momma!" She smiles at me and gives me a hug. I hide my face in her sweater. It's a little scratchy but warm.

"I love you, too, honey," she says in my ear. "You know I wouldn't let anybody bad hurt you, right?"

"I know, Momma, but-"

"And that if you ever need me, all you have to do is call for me, right?"

I know what she means. She's trying to say that she wouldn't ever let the devil get me. But the devil is smarter than Momma. He knows how to trick people into thinking he isn't the devil, and then when nobody's looking, he'll take me. I've told all this to Momma before, but she never believes me. I want to tell her now, but she'll just say I'm being silly.

"Yes, Momma."

"OK, then. Have sweet dreams and I'll see you in the morning. I'll even make Mickey-Mouse pancakes for breakfast." She kisses me one more time.

"Momma, don't forget the night light!"

"I wouldn't dare," she says, and kneels by the door where my guard dog night-light is. She turns it on and then turns out the big light.

I'm all by myself now. Time to go through the Devil Check.

I hop out of bed, and the first thing I do is close my closet door and put my desk chair in front of it. Sometimes the devil likes to come out of my closet.

I make sure all my dresser drawers are closed so that he can't hide in them. The last thing I have to do is look under my bed. That's the scariest thing to do cuz it's dark and I can't always see what's under there. The devil can make himself invisible, and I wouldn't be able to tell he was there.

I grab my teddy bear Boogie, and together we get on our hands and knees so that we can look under the bed. I hold my breath so that if the devil is there, he can't hear me breathing. I crawl to the bed, and....

One quick look and I jump back under my covers, scared that he might've been there but pretty sure that he wasn't. I bunch my covers all around me, and I make sure that the only thing outside of them is my head and Boogie. One time, my toes were peeping out of my blanket, and the devil grabbed them and dragged me to Hell that way. You can never know what the devil is going to do or how's he's going to get you. You have to be ready for anything.

Momma always tells me to think about nice things before I go to sleep, so that I can see those nice things in my dreams. It never works, but I always try it anyway. Tonight I think about when Momma and

Poppa would take me to amusement parks. Momma didn't like to go on the rides, so she would watch while Poppa and I would go on them. Our favorite one was the Pirate Boat. It would swing back and forth, and I would laugh and Poppa would hold me next to him, and I would always say "Poppa we're flying!" and he would laugh and say, "Yes, Cecily, we sure are!" And when we got off the ride, we would go look at the picture that was taken by a camera when we were on the ride. Momma would laugh and kiss Poppa and grab my hand and tell us how silly we were to like rides that could get you sick.

Since Poppa's been gone, we don't go to amusement parks anymore. Poppa went away a long time ago. Whenever I ask Momma where he went to, she gets this funny look on her face and tells me not to ask anymore, that she doesn't know where he is. Then she goes in her bedroom and cries for a long time.

I miss going to the carnival. I miss my Poppa, too....

Suddenly, I'm not in my room anymore. I'm in the kitchen and I'm sitting in a high chair, but I don't know why because I only sat in high chairs when I was a little baby. Momma is there with me, sitting in front of me. There is a bowl of yucky stuff on my tray, and I don't like it. I don't want to eat it, but Momma says I have to.

"It's oatmeal, Cecily, and it's good for you, so you have to eat it," she says, but I shake my head and yell NO! I want to tell her that it tastes like sand, but I don't know how to talk anymore. All I can do is keep shaking my head. "No! No! No!" I scream. The only word I know is "no."

"If you don't eat this oatmeal I'm going to feed it to you!" Momma says, getting mad. She takes the spoon from my hand and takes a BIG scoop of oatmeal. Yuck, yuck! She forces the spoon in my mouth. Eew! It tastes bad! I shudder and spit out the sandy food. Some of it gets into Momma's eye, and she gets mad. "That's it, you're gonna get it!" she yells. Then she gets a scared look on her face. I wonder why she's scared.

I can't see it, but I hear the wall behind me start to cry. I hear noises like the wall is ripping in two. I start to get scared. I wet my pants and think, "Oh, boy, Momma's gonna be really mad now," but she doesn't say anything, even though my pee-pee is starting to drip through my underwear and leak down my chair.

Then I hear a laugh, and I know that the devil has found me.

Momma! I want to scream. Don't let him get me! I see her reach out her arms to me, but the devil gets me first. He wraps his red arms around my high chair and pretends like he's hugging me, but I know better. I turn my neck to look up at his face, only it's Poppa's face I see. Tricky devil!

"Darren, is that you?" Momma says, still scared.

"Yes, Lucy, it's me. I'm going to take Cecily to the carnival," says the devil in my Poppa's voice.

"Do you promise to come back this time?"

"Of course, honey. Don't worry, we'll be fine, won't we, Cecily?" The devil winks at me, and I start to cry.

"She doesn't look excited to go, Darren."

"She's just nervous. See you later."

Momma! I try to scream, but I still can't talk. The devil takes me through the wall, and we fall straight through to the bottom of the earth. "Oopsie daisy!" the devil says, and drops me, high chair and all. I can see Hell from where I am. The closer I get, the hotter I get. My clothes melt off of me, and my chair catches on fire. The devil's going to let me get on fire!!!

"Momma!" I scream. I can finally talk again! "Momma!"

"Cecily baby, what is it?" Suddenly Momma's shaking me, and I'm not on fire anymore. I'm in my bed again, under my Pretty-Pretty-Princess covers.

I start to cry and I can't stop.

Drifting
Tina Carroll

You overtook my whole self
like a wave crashing in
stealing solace from an isolated shore.
I was content, sunning, recovering peacefully
basking in the idea of self-preservation
when your touch stirred the waters
and propelled me to delve into
a sea of uncertainty-
salt water in a fresh and open wound.
But I found solace engulfed in your tide
and now only yearn to drift
in the vast blue blanket of your love.

"Pass Around" Poem

Amanda Goins, Kim Riccardo, Megan Bodnar

The rain poured down onto the sweltering pavement
It cools the heat that invades my body
And ravishes my soul like an unwanted desire
I sit and ponder the loves that were lost
Some I do not miss
But others have left an empty void
Which I fear will never be filled
But which do I choose – a path unspoken
The path I must take is shrouded in darkness
I stumble forward looking for a sign to guide me
God, don't forsake me this time
The one who sees all is also the one who sees nothing
So now where do I turn?
To the stars that haunt me on a cool autumn night
They whisper to me of things unknown and unseen
Now I am the one who sees all
Into the darkness I am revived
I can see no more sorrow in my future
There will come a better day.

Skeletons in My Closet
Maura Giles

I shed my skins and hung them up.
Each one holds a memory.
The flowered skirt I wore the night
he placed his sights on me.

The black slacks I wore out to dinner
when we had our first date.
The red sweat pants I wore the night
we stayed up much too late.

The overalls I wore the day
we spent painting our room.
The white lace dress I wore the day
he stood as the groom.

The maternity gown that I thought
made me look like a cow.
The solid black burial dress
he's sobbing onto now.

I Always Knew We Were Almost There

Sara Post

I always knew we were almost there
by the rhythmic thumping of the tires
on the cracked, uneven road.
My heart would soar
as we turned in the driveway-
a perfect tunnel through great leafy Oaks.
The air smelled faintly rich
from the rolling golden-green fields
of sweet clover
that surrounded the barn,
carpeting the hills on the horizon.
Inside the woven-red doors
treasures of kitten nests
slept in the hay
and white downy lambs
were born on frosty dark nights.
Evenings were spent in the
yellow-warm kitchen,
where through the window,
across the fields,
the cattle grazed,
silhouetted against a masterpiece of sunset.
An old rope swing
hung in the dappled shadows of a great Oak.
The rope would creak as my feet touched the sky
and I would look up into the vast green canopy,
making myself dizzy as I soared back and forth.
Now the cracked uneven road leads me past,
and I grow homesick for childhood.

Longing for Beauty
Amanda Jo Niccum

This beautiful fat woman
Sitting with her gorgeous white belly hanging out
Is lost in this stupid culture.
People see her fat and taunt her
She bows her head in defeat.
Wishing that people could see her beauty.
Her flashy fat body is a symbol of self.
She longs to feel content in her world
But all judge her and cringe at the site.
She wants to run naked and yell,
Desires people to see who she really is.
Most turn away because she is obese.
She is not skinny or even of healthy appearance.
They see her as fat and grotesque.
This beautiful fat woman who is real.

The Restless Widow's Delay
William Mottolese

1.

The restless widow delays her cleaning and walks
Along a wash alone, now dry in a dry summer.
Her trailer sits in the mesa's growing shadow;
Late afternoon, the high blue sky is turning white at its edges.

2.

The raven circles high over a red canyon floor.
Its shadow drifts to meet a woman on the ground.
Her dark eyes sparkle, her hair moves in the wind.
The cottonwoods move too- hush, hush, they say,
And the woman's eyes rise to see raven eyes in the sky.
Woman, who rises in spirals on the air and drifts
In the wind, widow woman, flies with the raven
Over canyons, over mesa-tables and rooftops,
In and around the crumbling walls of lost people.
She shouts her warning, flashes her black-winged caution:

The color of death is black:
The color at the thunderstorm's heart
And the bottom of the white ram's throat
And the hot earth-womb of the sweat lodge.

3.

Dark night is in the canyon, and the air is still;
A cry is heard; a baby's soft head pushes
Through flesh to air. A widow's bone hard hands
Meet the wrinkled child, and a mother sighs and wails
As her red wet child clutches at the night and screams.
The cool canyon walls shudder with the rising voices
And a distant raven's warning, high in the night air.

Grandma's Kitchen

Nicholas T. Schafer

I am apprehensive,
Afraid of what I might see.

I know what I expect,
But so many things that should be,
Aren't

I want to find my Grandma busy in the kitchen,
The center of her universe.

Anything that happens,
Somehow ends up at my Grammie's kitchen table
Sooner or later.

The gift of imagination allows my mind's eye
To see Grammie sitting in her accustomed spot at the end of the table,
Picking that perfect vantage point so that she can see everyone
who comes in the back door.

I can see her now, as I drift back through the years to the countless
times that have taken this picture for granted:
Grammie sitting on the edge of her chair,
her widow's peak coming almost level with
the top wave of her silvery hair.
I imagine her turning to see me climb the stairs from the landing,
And as she does a *Kleenex* falls from the drooping pocket
of her well-worn sweater-vest.

I can see all these things now, in memory.
The images of the woman that I admire more than most men,
Are burned deep within me
And are held fast, in fear.

I have been away too long, and things aren't like that anymore.
I am afraid that they never will be again
But most of all
I am afraid to forget.

Interest of Love

Tim Hayes

Dancing into a groove
Starting up right to move
And realized the dance
Happened good to a trance
Publicly displaying romance
It was a good chance
People watched
Closely and with caution
The remainder of the night
People felt down
Because the anger grew
Rapidly moving high
Decreasing the happiness
People stopped dancing
Sitting to be unhappy
People chatted
Endlessly.
Sadness evolves slowly
As one remembers
The haunting of paradise
Swelling in a sweat bead
Stressing everyone
With thoughts of love
Deciding on girlfriends
Headache or problem,
What do we need?
We really do need
The loving of a candle
Just to handle
The love of life
Decisions become easier
Having a special candle
To debate your problems
So deal with the candle
Making love in life
Quite possible.

Contrition

Maura Giles

I look around the church, and see the fourth grade class making their first confessions. They all look so small and scared. I can't believe they make children go through that so young. It's not the most exhilarating experience for a fourth grader. It's actually quite frightening, if you don't know what you're doing. I knew what I was doing when I was in fourth grade, or at least, I thought I knew what I was doing.

I waited impatiently behind Erin, who, since we had to stand in alphabetical order according to last names, was always in line ahead of me. I wasn't excited to go in, I was nervous. I began to think about what the room looked like. 'It's probably a big, dark room with heavy, metal screens that don't move and cold stone walls on every side. Probably a lot like the haunted house I went to last Halloween. I ran out of *it* screaming.'

I looked around the church, which was empty except for my fourth grade class and the two old women that were there every day. I looked behind me and saw Tommy Plume picking his nose. He pulled his finger away as soon as I looked at him, but I knew what he was doing. Behind him was Jeff Price. His legs were crossed as he squirmed around. He always had to go to the bathroom.

"I bet those old women live here," Tommy said. I faced the front again, noticing that Erin was gone. Tommy always stood behind me in line. I hated that. He was mean. "I bet they wear diapers just like my little brother," he continued. I ignored him. I didn't really care about the old women either. I thought they smelled funny. But he shouldn't have made fun of them in church.

All of my classmates, except Tommy, were studying the *Act of Contrition*, which we had to memorize so we could tell the priest we were sorry for our sins. I didn't understand why I couldn't just say, "I'm sorry God" and be done with it, but I was smart, and I had written the *Act of Contrition* on my hand so that I wouldn't forget it.

I saw Erin come out of the room, sniffing. I could see a drop of sweat run over her temple, down the side of her cheek. Her mouth made a frown that drooped past her chin. She did not look happy. "Great!" I thought. "I'm doomed." It was my turn. I walked into the small, warm room that was about the size and shape of an elevator, nothing like I

imagined. I stood in front of a chair, face to face with the priest. I thought surely there would be a screen, or booth, or something, *anything*, separating the two of us, but there wasn't. I was extremely nervous. I began to fidget.

"Don't be nervous," the priest said. It was Father Jack, one of the parish priests.

I smiled an uneasy smile and sat down in a chair facing him. He was a young guy. Well, he was younger than Father Karl, who had white hair and always seemed grumpy. Father Jack had thick, light brown hair and big, dark brown eyes. I didn't know him that well, but I knew I liked him better than Father Karl.

I confessed my sins. The ones that were typical of a fourth grader: "I stole Kevin's eraser. I called my brother names. I punched Tommy Plume about five minutes ago." Father Jack nodded his head after each one and made an "mhm" noise.

It was time for me to say the *Act of Contrition*. I wasn't worried. I could easily glance down at my hands to remind me of what I was supposed to say, and no one would be the wiser.

Unfortunately, it did not go as smoothly as I had planned. Because I was so nervous when I first walked in, my palms were sweating. All that fidgeting made me smear my cheat sheet. I did my best to remember what I could, but it wasn't good enough. *My Act of Contrition* went something like this:

"O my God, I am *hardly* (heartily) sorry for having offended you." I knew this part, so I wasn't worried yet. I sat up a little. "I detest all my sins *just because of your* (because of your just) punishments." The words were a little smeared, so I was struggling to read them. I did my best. I only glanced down once or twice, but Father Jack had no idea. I threw my shoulders back and got louder. "They offend you, my God, who are all *dood* (good) and deserving of all my *lope* (love)." I glanced down again. I was so sure of myself now. I began to shout. "I *grimly* (firmly) resolve, with the *kelp* (help) of your grace, to *win* (sin) no more and to *abide* (avoid) the occasions of sin." I was nearing the edge of my chair, when I realized what I had actually said. "Amen." I said in a soft voice, slouching back into my chair. My throat closed, and my stomach sank.

It was obvious to Father Jack that I was reading it off of my

hand. And it was obvious to me, too when I was finished. I didn't realize what I had said until it was too late. I felt my face turn pale, and thousands of Goosebumps grew on my arms. I lifted my eyes to see Father Jack, afraid of what was going to happen next. He stared at me, a little stunned at first, but then he smiled. I couldn't figure it out. I thought he might start laughing at me. He didn't. Instead, he placed his hand over my head and began to say the Absolution. I bowed my head, and as my eyes shifted downward, I noticed that he was looking at his hand. I thought he had the absolution prayer written on his hand. I couldn't believe it! After that I didn't feel so bad. I smiled, and closed my eyes as he finished the prayer.

After he finished, he gave me a wink and told me that I did a good job on my first Confession. I started to walk out, then I turned around and waved goodbye. He waved back. It wasn't until later that I realized that as he waved, there was nothing written on his hand.

Now, *I'm* one of the two old ladies at church everyday, and although I don't have to write it on my hand, I still have trouble remembering my *Act of Contrition*.

For Grandma
Megan Taylor

You were a hand to hold
A refuge to flee to
On nights when screams filled the air
You made God real
He shone through you and onto us all
And we left you sometimes
Separated by a closed wooden door
Trading talks and Diet Cokes
For busy schedules, racing time
You always knew just how much was enough
In spoiling us, in discipline, in cleaning our plates
And you emanated such devotion
To all the children in the pictures covering your living room
I won't forget the joy in your Italian eyes as you
Looked on my new baby cousins
Or how strong you were through your pain
Still taking on ours
I never knew how much I needed you
My solace, my faith, my friend
And now I want more than anything to hold that hand
That never let me stumble
To rock you and tell you it's all OK
To tell you that I'm proud to share your blood
You, reduced to silence
I can't remember when I last heard your laugh, just your singing
You, reduced to a victim, and I, away from your side as you fade
Your life in the hands of those you fashioned
Tortured by what you would say
You, beyond my reach, unaware of us pleading, praying
Peaceful in sleep
Me, selfish, wanting you here and not in the Hands
You taught me to reach for
Me, with tears you can't wipe away.

The Last Lamp

Sara Post

The tiny ding of the bell caught my attention and I stepped out from the back office into the store. An elderly couple shuffled through the door. I could smell the freshness of the rain and hear the cars as they drove by. The door closed and again everything outside the window became muted and only sound came from the old wooden floor creaking as they made their way to the counter.

They leaned against each other as older couples who have been together a long time do. The man had on a thick gray sweater which almost matched the color of his beard hanging down. The hair on his head was much lighter and wisped out, forming an illuminated halo as he stood against the light. His thin wire frame glasses perched on the tip of his nose. He smiled at me as his wife began reading the menu to him. He was not listening. I smiled at him. One gnarled hand grasped a cane, the other held his wife's hand.

"Henry," she said. He turned to look at her. "Were you listening to me? I told you to listen. Do I need to ask you again?" He nodded his head. Her hair, not as gray as his, was curled tightly against her head. Her light brown jacket was spotted dark where the rain had fallen. She pursed her lips, feigning exasperation, but the corners curled up. She winked at me.

I leaned against the glass top of the ice cream case and watched them. I could feel the sides of the cooler warm against my legs. The day had been slow, only one other couple had come in the shop all morning. The glass cases of lemonade candy and ice cream stood sparkling clean in the quiet store.

"I used to live here when I was little," the man said looking around the store. Shelves of jams and jellies, bakery cookies and loaves of bread steamy in their bags sat untouched. The clock ticked on the wall behind me. I heard the familiar clip clop of an Amish buggy going by the store. The sounds of monotony.

"In Shipshewana?"

"Yes. Of course. This building was a butcher shop then. The town was just a crossroads in the country." His wife as she dug her wallet out of purse. She was much younger than he was, and he tottered as he let go of her arm then leaned on his cane, both hands on the brass handle

in front of him. He smiled again. I tried to imagine him as a young boy running along the dusty streets of the town and looking in shop windows, playing ball. I liked him better as an old man.

"Leave the young lady alone Henry," she said. She rolled her eyes as her cheeks rose up pink in a smile. She was much younger than he was. "I'm afraid she doesn't want to hear your stories."

"I tell good stories. You're just jealous because you don't have any," he peeked over his shoulder to see if he had gotten a rise out of her. "She's a dandy peppy woman if you can get her going," he tried to whisper, but his voice was just as loud. "I used to tell her stories, too, she was captivated by me."

"He'll just have a coffee," she said, placing a dollar bill on the counter. "He can't seem to pay attention long enough to decide on something else. He thinks all the young ladies like to hear him talk." She turned to him. "Henry, I am going to sit down right over there." He nodded.

I had not made any coffee yet that morning and would have brought it to him when it was finished but he did not want to leave the counter.

"I bought a lamp last week," he said. His eyes sparkled.

"Really?" I smiled.

"Nicest lamp you ever saw. Oil lamp. One of the old fashioned ones. My wife and I were visiting our daughter a couple of weeks ago. We're big antique hunters."

I opened the can of coffee and measured out enough for the pot. "Where does your daughter live?" I asked, my voice unconsciously louder.

"Nashville." He stepped closer to the counter and peered into the case of ice cream. "We saw the lamp then, but we didn't buy it. My wife," he jerked his head towards the table where she sat, "she's a tight wad sometimes. Doesn't enjoy spending the money." He winked at me, his eyes crinkled. "I try to spend it on her sometimes, and she turns all red. I can still fluster her!"

"Would you like anything for your coffee?" I smiled as I asked, peering at his wife to see if she had heard what he said. She was gazing out the window, hands folded on the table in front of her. It was raining harder now, streams of water poured off the eaves and ran down to the street. Her shoulders were relaxed and she seemed peacefully lost in the

quiet of the store. The sidewalks were empty save a few straggling tourists under umbrellas. Summer brought shoppers by the dozen by the crowds always died away with the cooler weather.

"Oh no, I like my coffee black. Just black." He paused for a moment and thought. "Well I couldn't get the lamp off my mind. It's like nothin' you have ever seen. It's really big with a double chimney," he was gesturing with his hands, holding them around the base of an imaginary lamp. "We drove off all the way back to Nashville just to pick it up. I couldn't stand not having it anymore."

"That's a long way," I said.

"Well, I had to have it. When you've got something on your mind you've got something on your mind."

He paused and turned to look out the glass doors. With his back to me, I could see the slump in his shoulders. He reminded me of my grandfather as I remembered him before he got sick. I smiled again as I thought how he would be doing the very same thing if he were still alive. He loved to talk and anyone who would listen became his new spell-bound audience. Henry turned his back around and smiled at me, his head cocked.

"Do you read?"

"I love to read."

"Have you ever read *Gone with the Wind*?"

"Yes, I have."

"Well that is just wonderful. Everyone needs to read that book. You know, no one cares about anything anymore. No one wants to read anything. But everyone *needs* to read that book."

"How many times have you read that book Henry?" his wife called.

"Four. *Four times!*" He held up his fingers. "I brought my lamp to the store around the corner."

"To the metal works guy?" I asked, not sure which shop he meant.

"Yes. His is going to fix the lamp for me. He says he has never seen a lamp like that before. He says it is old. But he is going to fix it so it works again."

"Do you know how old it is?"

"Well, the lady working at the antique place in Nashville said it was from the Civil War era. It has horses and flowers etched in the glass

globes. Have you ever seen a double chimney oil lamp?" he asked me again.

I told him I never had, but that it surely must be interesting. I poured the coffee in a mug and it steamed hot and black. Careful not to spill the hot liquid over the edge I asked him if he would like me to carry it to the table where his wife sat. He nodded.

"Do you know why I had to have that lamp?" he asked me as he followed me slowly to the table.

"Why is that?"

"Because it is from history. It could have seen the Civil War. Isn't that interesting? It could be the last lamp. Did you ever think about that? It could be the last one."

The couple talked softly as he drank his coffee. The rain was not falling as hard now but the sky was still gray. Outside I could see the afternoon fading away. She stood up and gathered her coat around her. Henry stood too and together they began making their way to the door. Leaving the counter, I opened the door for them.

"I hope you can get your lamp fixed," I said as they passed through the door.

Henry looked at me, his eyes blank, and turned to his wife. She whispered something in his ear and he studied me for a moment. He shook his head and turned to look out the door.

"I'm sorry," she whispered as she leaned towards me. "He gets this way sometimes. Some days are better than others." For the first time I noticed how tired her eyes were. The wrinkles no longer seemed well worn from age and smiling, but were etched with worry. "She squeezed his arm and sighed softly. "He loves to talk about that lamp, dear. It was great hearing about it again."

Pleasure to Burn

Maura Giles

There were 20 of us- all alike.

He pushed them aside and chose me.

He gently caressed the white of my body with the firm pink tips of his fingers.

He knew he could only have me once.

He gripped me gently as if I were going to break and surveyed me- up, then down.

His look was that of a crazed vulture who hadn't eaten in days.

He'd just found his first corpse.

I was feeble in his immense, sturdy hands, but I knew he wouldn't hurt me.

He needed me.

His moist lips touched the top of me.

I felt heat rise slowly in my body- bottom to top.

With each breath he drew into him, I could sense myself perishing.

It was exhilarating!

I began to feel lighter and lighter.

"You taste good," he exhaled and tossed me to the ground.

The fire went out.

The heat was gone.

I just lay there on the ground and watched him as he burned another

just like me-

with the same intensity,

and walked away.

Jealousy
Susan Huss

A tidal wave crashes over you,
Suffocates your last breath,
Swirls around you in warm, salty streams,
Pressures you 'til you feel you'll explode.
Nothing but ringing in your head,
You lose control.

Dad-in-the-Box

Bree Ma'Ayteh

He popped up like a Jack-in-the-Box;

Pop, here he is, only for a second, then Pop, gone again.

The last time I saw my father, I was fourteen, and it was
the day before my graduation.

The hello kiss he stamped on me was hesitant and sloppy,

The top of his head looked like it had been used as an ashtray, and

His breath shouted of Budweiser, a Big Mac and

a pack of Kool Milds.

A permanent smile was etched into his face, and I think his eyes were
scared to tear themselves away from the yellow tiles on the floor,

Because he never looked at me once.

He commented on the weather and the "new" haircut

I had gotten three months ago-

I didn't have much to say;

Mom had always told me not to talk to strangers.

He boasted of his new Camero and his new apartment in the suburbs.

"You'll have to come over and see it sometime," he said,

As if I was one of his drinking buddies he was meeting at the bar.

Before he left, he threw me a ten-dollar bill and a promise
to take me to the new Christian Slater movie.

I haven't seen him since.

Get a Piece
Maura Giles

Cut by a knife,
It bleeds uncontrollably.
Secretly, I want to taste it.
Its warm, tan skin splits,
And red bubbles out.

I can't wait to get a piece-
Of mom's cherry pie.

The Rhythm of a Guitar in a Dream

Patrick J. Smith

My guitar sounds so sweet
Chords fling and vibrate in the air
Hands move like the arms of a gambler
Eyes swim through the waves
Creating dream like phrases
A sudden pause the world stops
My guitar sleeps in my arms like a newborn baby
Then the sound of the newborn cry
led me back the right way
I missed the feel of that polished guitar
Like looking at your reflection on a polished glass
The feel of strings rang smoothly through my ears
The order of the frets stood in line dazed at the fright of
A drill sergeant coming his way
The fear of the hands coming
toward patiently went away
Then the melody flew away and
the hands caressed the guitar
Similar to holding a white shark tooth in your hand while
Submerged in the water abysmally away
Complete rhythm like
Sammy Davis Jr. tapping on stage